Ms. A. 1.1 v. 8, p. 268

(copy)

52

Roxbury, April 10, 1873.

My Dear Friend:

April and May were always in close proximity, but at your birth the two became indissolubly joined together; for to-morrow, if I mistake not, will be the completion of your sixty-third year, which fact shows that my statement is not paradoxical. If I were with you, I should give you my congratulations, and, after the Oriental style, wish that your shadow may never be less. Deprived of that pleasure, I must felicitate you on paper, substituting an epistle for bodily presence, and written symbols for vocal utterances. Now, I am aware that there are some persons who are morbidly averse to advancing in life, though, do what they will, they cannot prevent it; and all such will deem me very ungracious, not to say cruel, in making it a complimentary matter that you are not as young as you have been; in plain English, that you are growing old! But as I have no sympathy with them, and, what is more to the point, am more than five years your senior, (catch one if you can!) I will take back nothing, because I know you do not train in that company. To-morrow will bring you no vain regrets that the number of your years is extending in one direction, and lessening in another; for you neither sigh to go back, nor desire to remain stationary. Byron asks, "Who would not again be a boy?" An absurd question, if intended to be literally applied; for, in that case, it would be tantamount to asking who would not like to have the laws of being and the order of creation reversed. Happy is he who can

"Forget the steps already trod,
And onward urge his way,"

rejoicing in never ending progression!

So, my dear friend, let your sixty-third birthday be a

festive occasion, and cause for thanksgiving. Should your stay upon the earth prove to be as long as was that of your venerable father, you have yet to live more than thirty years before you will see "the last of earth"; and so are really a little past your prime! But at your age and mine, the difference of a few years is of very little consequence; and it is only for us to be ready for our final translation at any hour. Come when it may, in God's own time; it cannot be for evil, but only for good; and while we may do nothing rashly to hasten the event, we have no reason to doubt that it opens the way for a higher and nobler development than is possible in this mundane sphere. Why are not the wisdom and goodness of God to be as fully recognised in our mortality as in our present being — in our exit as in our birth?

Wordsworth happily declares —

"The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not, indeed,
For that which is most worthy to be blest, —
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast; —
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings,
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving in worlds not realized,
High instincts, before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised, —

But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing,
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal silence: truths that wake,
To perish never,—
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavor,
Nor man, nor boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!"

I think comparatively few have attained your age, who can take a more satisfactory retrospective view, or who have cause for more thankfulness for opportunities enjoyed and improved to do good, and to be a blessing to the world. Not that your ideal has been reached, for that is perfection; but, from your youth up, you have endeavored to keep a conscience "void of offence toward God and toward man," to faithfully discharge all the duties and relations of life, to walk in the light as revealed to your own soul, to set a high example of personal integrity and purity, and to "study the things that make for peace". I need not speak of that portion of your life consecrated to the deliverance of those who were held in the galling fetters of slavery in our land, but who are now rejoicing in their freedom. I will only say, that I look in vain to find an instance of greater fidelity to principle, of a more thorough devotion to the claims of suffering humanity, of nobler disinterestedness, or of more persistent effort to give success to the righteous cause. In other directions, too, your labors have been untiring in the vineyard of the Lord, and other righteous movements have received and are still receiving your efficient support. Respected and esteemed by a large circle of acquaintance, having "troops of friends", blessed with one of the best of wives and with beloved and loving children, the return of your birth-day may indeed ~~must~~ be

an occasion of the purest delight.

It must indeed be like a household benediction to have your venerable and greatly to be venerated mother with you. Give her my warmest regards, and best wishes for a comfotable state of health. She has passed the goal of threescore years and ten a long distance, with faculties unimpaired, with a sympathetic heart still interested in whatever seeks to bind up the broken-hearted and relieve the suffering, and with a lively interest in the various reformatory movements of the day. Hers is truly a "green old age," beautiful in its fruits, and lovely to contemplate. It was your good fortune to have a most excellent mother, as well as father, and they have been blessed in having a most dutiful son. For such there must be a mansion of rest, and may she be spared all bodily distress in gaining possession of it.

You were very kind in sending me so long a letter; yet, busy as you are with so many things, I felt almost sorry that I gave you the occasion to write it, though I would not have had it one sentence shorter.

My own letter to you had hardly been dropped into the post-office box before your dear wife called upon us, communicating much interesting intelligence, and affording us much pleasure as she never fails to do. We all thought that she was looking exceedingly well, and she seemed to be in excellent spirits. Doubtless she is now at home, and will make to-morrow all the brighter by her presence.

My wife and children unite with me in congratulations and kind remembrances to you all.

Yours to the end of time, and longer,

Wm. Lloyd Garrison.

Rev. Samuel May.

P.S. Before receiving your letter, I got Frank to buy for me twelve copies of dear S. J. M's Life, and he got them for a dollar a volume. Thanks for a copy of your biographical sketch of Col. Joseph May.

Ms. A. 1.1 v. 8, p. 26B

Roxbury, April, 10, 1873